

KAUAI 'AKIALOA

(*Hemignathus procerus*)

The Hawaiians said of the 'Akialoa, "He wahi manu leo lea no hoi kēia ke kani mai." "This is really a cheerful small voiced bird when it sings." Whether the cheerful calls of this rare and beautiful bird resound through the remote rainforests of Kaua'i today is unknown. The last reported sighting was 1973; the last well-documented sighting was recorded in 1965.

DISTRIBUTION: 'Akialoa were found in the Alaka'i Swamp of Kaua'i.

DESCRIPTION: The most distinctive feature of the 'Akialoa is its long down-curved bill — one-third the length of its body. Adult males are bright olive-yellow above and yellow below. Throat, breast, and sides of the body are olive-yellow. Females are green-gray above and have shorter bills. Length is 7.5 inches.

VOICE: The song has been described as canary-like and "short and soft, similar to the trill of the 'Amakihi." Call resembles that of House Finch, yet louder.

NESTING: Little is known about the breeding biology of the Kaua'i 'Akialoa. It has been noted that females have enlarged ovaries in April, denoting the onset of the breeding season.

DIET: The 'Akialoa uses its long curved bill to probe into holes and under the bark of trees for insects and their larvae, and to take nectar from 'Uhi'a and lobelia flowers.

CONSERVATION NOTE: Subspecies of 'Akialoa which formerly inhabited O'ahu, Lana'i, and Hawai'i are now extinct. A separate species, the Kaua'i 'Akialoa, was once numerous in undisturbed native forests. The last sighting was in 1967 in the Alaka'i Swamp, and it is very likely that the Kaua'i species, if not already, may soon be extinct.

Records from the early 1900s indicate that the population of the Kaua'i 'Akialoa was already beginning to decline by the turn of the century. During that time birds were observed with sores and swellings on their feet and heads, suggesting that avian diseases were taking their toll. The feeding habits of the 'Akialoa often took them to lower elevation forests, a habit which may have increased their exposure to introduced diseases. The bite of a mosquito or assuming the perch of an infected bird can transmit disease.

The introduced birds inhabiting the disturbed lowland forests of Kaua'i far outnumber the native birds in the same area. However, the balance is tipped in favor of the native forest birds in the remote 'Ohi'a forests of the Alaka'i Swamp where the native bird population is estimated to be ten times as large as that of introduced birds. This area provides essential habitat for Kaua'i's endangered forest birds. Their survival requires that any development of the Alaka'i be prevented and that the control of negative influences from introduced plants and animals be given high priority.



Kaua'i 'Akialoa use their long bill to probe for insects; female, left, male right.
— Painting by Sheryl Ives Boynton